Greetings,

We wanted to make sure we had our report in by today's deadline. However, we had another update to amend from Dr. Hamlet, which is below:

First, my Communication class (Rhetoric and Public Issues) had a "town meeting" on last Wednesday on the subject of student retention and NIU's suitcase culture. It was featured in the Northern Star last Thursday. The course is a general education course so the student population consisted of freshmen through seniors and students from CLAS, BUS, and CEET. We also had guests who were students in one of these colleges. We had a total of about 35-40 students present. I also interviewed two students: a freshman and a sophomore. Following are my notes from the town meeting and the two interviews.

Students spoke very passionately about the following:

Advising. They commented that they often receive wrong information and quite frequently were victims of the "Huskie Shuffle," being sent from one person to another and sometimes back to the original person. People don't know the answer to students' questions so they get shuffled off to some one else who may or may not know the answer to their questions. Many students get lost in the shuffle and get discouraged.

Classroom Communication: Students complained about having a number of adjunct professors who come in teach the course and are not available outside of class. They have full-time jobs elsewhere or even on campus. They are just there to teach that course and to communicate while in the classroom. They don't respond to emails and do not have office hours. They also communicated about some full-time professors who are more occupied with their research and not interested in teaching subject matter and this attitude comes through in the classroom. Some TAs who are in charge of a class may not know any more than what is in the textbook. So they can't offer understandable or relevant examples to complex information.

Campus Activities: Other than reading the Northern Star and wading through the number of flyers stapled on bulletin boards (some of which have been there since the previous semester), students do not have an efficient way of finding out about campus events. They usually find out about activities the day after the event. Students also
complained that the process students must go through to plan and promote an event is very confusing. Again, they referred to being victims of the Huskie shuffle.

Diversity among Students: Some student leaders in the meeting spoke up about many students thinking that just because an ethnic group is the sponsor of an event that it is only for that specific ethnic group. They confirmed that it was not, but the general student body thinks that it is and stay away. Existing in silos is a big issue among the general student population.

High tuition/Dorm Rates: This was also cited as an issue related to retention. Students reported that they were better off going to community colleges to complete their general education requirements because it was cheaper and because of the size of community colleges, they were better and more appropriately advised. Many students cannot afford to live in the dorms so they live at home (and commute) or in an apartment in the campus area but experience a disconnect with the campus community as a result of it.

Absence of Community: Students spoke about the absence of community. The only times students, faculty and staff come together is in times of tragedy and even then that goes away after a few days. They talked about a lack of pride in being a Huskie that would bring people together.

Better Mentoring Partnerships among Students: Many students experience NIU in isolation and this becomes discouraging. Students mentioned that during orientation they experience information overload and then they are left alone. There needs to be ongoing efforts to connect students with other students; student organizations; faculty groups and what DeKalb has to offer.

Ridding or Reducing the Suitcase Culture: The major and consistent argument was: There's nothing to do on campus or DeKalb on the weekends, so why stay?

Other comments made particularly in the interviews were:

Some students HAVE to work 1 to 2 jobs just to pay tuition and/or rent. Work and Study - they don't have time for anything else. Students mentioned other students that they know who have to work to help out their families at home.
Fear of other students keep some students from wanting to live in 
the dorms or of interacting in student organizations or staying on 
campus in the evenings for activities.

I (Arielle) would like to add that some students are married, nontraditional, and can only attend NIU by 
living in the residence halls during the week, and commuting to be back with their families on the 
weekends (if they live 1.5+ hours away). We will want to work on retention efforts for these students. Are 
there going to be future housing scholarships?
Thank you for reviewing this information. If you would like me to condense information together from my 
last e-mail, I will gladly do so. We have had some student interviews that had to reschedule, but we have 
had input from more than ten students thus far. We may receive more feedback later.

Cordially,

Arielle Kalvelage  
Transfer Counselor  
Admissions  
Williston Hall, 1st Floor  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL 60115  
akaalvelage1@niu.edu  
Office: 815-753-0446